

Message Text

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S E C R E T SAIGON 11475

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS PINT VS

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT THIEU

1. CHARGE' TOOK ADMIRAL GAYLER TO CALL ON PRESIDENT THIEU AT THE PALACE MORNING OF AUGUST 31 (MAJOR GENERAL HUNT, ACTING DATT, AND BRIGADIER GENERAL JACKSON OF CINCPAC STAFF WERE ALSO PRESENT). THE FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR 45 MINUTE DISCUSSION IN THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE.

2. POLITICAL SITUATION:

A. ON THE GENERAL POLITICAL SITUATION THE PRESIDENT, AS HE HAD DONE BEFORE, SAID HE STRONGLY FAVORS THE POLITICAL SOLUTION ENVISIONED BY THE PARIS AGREEMENTS FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT IT WORKS IN THE GVN'S FAVOR. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE NO POLITICAL BASE IN SOUTH VIETNAM. HE NOTED THAT IT HAD BEEN SAID BY SOME IN THE US THAT ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM SHOULD BE REDUCED IN ORDER TO FORCE HIM TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT. HIS VIEW IS THAT REDUCTION OF ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM ONLY ENCOURAGES HANOI TO TRY FOR A MILITARY SOLUTION.

3. US MILITARY ASSISTANCE:

A. ADMIRAL GAYLER TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT BASED ON INFORMATION

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HE HAD JUST RECEIVED HE COULD SAY --- WITHOUT GIVING A FIRM

ASSURANCE --- THAT WE WOULD VERY LIKELY HAVE ABOUT \$100 MILLION MORE AVAILABLE THAN WE HAD THOUGHT (WITHIN THE TOTAL OF \$700 MILLION) BECAUSE OF SOME VERY HELPFUL ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS WHICH HAD BEEN MADE IN THE PENTAGON.

B. PRESIDENT THIEU POINTED OUT THAT HE HAS GIVEN VERY FIRM INSTRUCTIONS TO CONSERVE AMMUNITION AND IS STRESSING TO THE JGS AND THE CORPS COMMANDERS THAT THE RVNAF MUST FIGHT A POOR MAN'S WAR. THE OTHER SIDE, HOWEVER, SEEMS TO HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF AMMUNITION. THEY HAVE USED AS MANY AS 2000 ROUNDS IN RELATIVELY MINOR OPERATIONS. THE GVN FORCES, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE SEVERELY RESTRICTED IN THEIR AMMUNITION USE AND THIS HAS ADVERSE EFFECTS ON MORALE.

C. THE PRESIDENT STRESSED THE MOBILITY PROBLEM AS ONE OF MAJOR CONCERN TO HIM. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE RVNAF HAS TO COVER THE ENTIRE COUNTRY AND THAT ALL FORCES ARE IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER COMMITTED. IF A REAL MAJOR DANGER DEVELOPS IN ANY ONE PARTICULAR AREA IT WAS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE THAT THE VIETNAMESE BE ABLE TO MOVE FORCES BY AIR OR ROAD AND TO DO SO QUICKLY. IN THIS CONNECTION THE POL OUTLOOK UNDER PROSPECTIVE FINANCIAL RESTRAINTS CLEARLY DISTURBS THE PRESIDENT.

D. PRESIDENT THIEU ASKED US WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO ONE-FOR-ONE REPLACEMENT. WE TOLD HIM THAT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO QUESTION THAT WE RETAIN THE RIGHT TO MAKE ONE-FOR-ONE REPLACEMENT BUT THAT GIVEN THE PRESENT REALITIES THIS DID NOT SEEM TO BE A GOOD WAY TO SPENDING THE MONEY.

4. CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION:

A. THE PRESIDENT DESCRIBED THE CURRENT MILITARY SITUATION AS A "GENERALIZED" OFFENSIVE WITH THE LIKELIHOOD OF A "GENERAL" ENEMY OFFENSIVE IF AND WHEN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PERCEIVE A WEAKNESS ON THE GVN SIDE AND DECIDE TO EXPLOIT IT. THE SITUATION, THE PRESIDENT SAID, REMINDS HIM OF THAT IN 1971. HOWEVER, THE ENEMY IS STRONGER NOW THAN PRIOR TO THE 1972 OFFENSIVE. ON THE OTHER HAND WE, I.E. THE GVN, ARE WEAKER BECAUSE THERE NO LONGER ARE A HALF MILLION ALLIED TROOPS. MOREOVER, THE ENEMY DOES NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT HIS REAR AREA SINCE THERE IS NO MORE AMERICAN AIR POWER TO INTERFERE WITH HIM.

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B. ON THE PLUS SIDE THE PRESIDENT NOTED THE BETTER PERFORMANCE OF THE RVNAF, THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND THE FACT THAT THE ENEMY SUPPLIES ARE NOT UNLIMITED. HE ALSO SAID THAT MORALE IS NOT GOOD ON THE OTHER SIDE.

C. IN 1972 AND IN 1968 PRESIDENT THIEU SAID THE ENEMY HAD MADE A MISTAKE BY TRYING THEIR ALL-OUT OFFENSIVE EVERYWHERE, ALL OVER THE

COUNTRY. HE DID NOT THINK THEY WOULD MAKE THAT MISTAKE THIS TIME BUT FINDING A WEAK SPOT WOULD CONCENTRATE THEIR "GENERAL" OFFENSIVE IN ONE AREA. HE MENTIONED QUANG TRI (BUT PROBABLY MEANT NORTHERN MR 1 AS A WHOLE) AS THE MOST LIKELY OBJECTIVE OF SUCH A "GENERAL" OFFENSIVE SHOULD HANOI DECIDE ON IT.

D. THE PRESIDENT DESCRIBED HIS OWN POLICY IN LIGHT OF THIS SITUATION

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BECAUSE THE RVNAF DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH REACH TO INTERFERE EFFECTIVELY WITH THE ENEMY REAR AREA AND LOGISTIC SYSTEM ALONG AND ON BOTH SIDES OF THE WESTERN BORDER OF THE COUNTRY, THE GVN WOULD HAVE TO LET HIM COME TO WITHIN REACH AND THEN STRIKE AT ENEMY SUPPLIES WHICH ARE NOT UNLIMITED. THE PRESIDENT, HOWEVER, DID POINT OUT THAT GIVING UP ANY REAL ESTATE CREATES PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS FOR THE GVN.
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